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COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SPINOZA AND NEO-REALISM AS INDICATED IN HOLT'S "CONCEPT OF CONSCIOUSNESS"

IN the temporal order of things, it is a long way from Baruch Spinoza to Edwin Holt, but certain similarities—one is tempted to say identities—in method and tone of thinking make them more like neighbors than ancestor and descendant in the philosophic domain. The student of philosophy who, like the poet, hobnobs with the past and the distant until these rigid categories seem quite dissolved, notes in the systems of these two men, more than apparent differences in content, surface resemblances that invite study and promise conclusions. I refer to a devoted and passionate use of mathematical form—dominant in Spinoza's style and Holt's thinking.

A similarity of background, more than chance coincidence of interest and mode of expression, lies responsible for these mathematical flowerings in philosophy. Preceding Spinoza and contemporary with him, the sixteenth and seventeenth century science, with its discoveries associated with the names of Copernicus, Galileo, Kepler, and Newton in physics, astronomy, and mathematics, contributed new significance and power to the last, and stimulated a fruitful interest in its methods and scope. Descartes, incorporating the new "scientific method"—as yet no other than the "mathematical method"—into philosophic speculation, set the fashion for expressing metaphysical truth in terms of equations, axioms, and propositions. Spinoza fell in with the styles, and ordering his theories like a treatise of Euclid to the point of being inordinately abstruse clearly became an extremist in the latest fashions. The mathematical character of the new truths made it seem inevitable that in the unity of nature all truths must be mathematical; precisely as in the later ninteenth century the advances in chemistry, physics, and biology, accompanied by a growing use and emphasis of the number science, has persuaded Holt that both the stuff and form of being are mathematical. Behind Holt and contemporary with him is what he chooses to call the "Renaissance of Logic" in the forms of symbolic logic, or algebra of logic.[1] Every laboratory contributes to the mathematics that is in the air, and makes the dominant coloring of Holt inevitable and representative.

Spinoza, as a radical devotee to mathematical method, treats of the nature and force of emotions as he treated mind and substance—exactly as he "would treat lines, planes, and bodies," for, as nature and her laws are uniform, the manner of comprehending her must likewise be so. Indeed, the universal laws are themselves this manner. In short, Spinoza sees nature to be logical and mathematical, and inevitably makes his treatment such. Holt, in turn, finds mathematics and logic to be the basic sciences, the sciences of pure being; for him, consequently, all things that *are* must be subject to these sciences. To anticipate conclusions later to be developed, Holt, like Spinoza, finds nature uniform, after a fashion, in law and substance; but he goes Spinoza one better, for where Spinoza finds nature to be profoundly modified by mathematical and logical entities, Holt finds her to be entirely constituted of such entities. Spinoza, although not so frankly stating it, even more radically implies this in his geometrical style of presentation; whereas Holt is content to use what in his own terminology he would call the "more complex" style of ordinary English exposition.

This apparent formal resemblance will be found to be not merely historical in origin and not the one resemblance. A hasty objector will remind one that Spinoza is a semi-medievalist, a rationalist, a pantheist, and a monist; whereas Holt is a modern, a radical empiricist, a pluralist, and a realist, and that their only possible kinship is their brotherhood through Adam. In answer, the purpose of this paper is to show that in Holt and Spinoza, these differences are in a great part verbal, and that the mathematical characteristics on the surface of these philosophies come from common fundamental similarities which I propose to trace, and in the tracing of which, I propose to indicate the fundamental divergences as well. This is less an attempt to wrench meanings from their temporal moorings and bring Spinoza up to date than to suggest by how much Spinoza has anticipated contemporary neo-realism. As the Spinozistic philosophy in its ethical and political aims is the more comprehensive of the two, I am for the most part compelled to disregard Spinoza's priority in time, and to adopt and compare his conceptions to those of Holt. This will necessitate following Holt's order of exposition rather than Spinoza's.

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[1] Holt opens his book, "The Concept of Consciousness" with the acknowledgment that "recent investigations in this field (symbolic logic) have brought out a number of new truths . . . which seem to me to bear importantly on philosophy as a whole, and especially on epistemology." He then proceeds to review the work germane to his purpose of Russell, Poincaré, Huntington, Franklin, and others.

I

METHOD

Similarity in Method of Understanding; Differences in Method of Procedure.—Method in philosophy divides itself into epistemology—method of understanding; and technique—method of procedure. "How we know" is given preference even to "what we know," and so it is conventional to discuss first the "how we know" of Spinoza and Holt. For Spinoza, the matter is summed up rather shortly in his "Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione,"[2] where method is defined as knowledge reflecting upon itself, seeking to find the best means of understanding. In this definition, the power of direct or intuitive perception is implied. The intellect must of necessity be granted as capable of obtaining a true, an immediate, and an adequate idea of its object (*ideatum*), or the thinking process could never go on; for once the validity of knowledge be questioned, the proposed method of knowing must first be tested by a "method" of a method, and so on *ad infinitum.* If we have to prove that we know, we will have to prove how we know we must prove that we know, etc. Consequently, the existence of method must postulate the existence of intuitive or self-guaranteeing knowledge. Searching for the best method, Spinoza finds the adequate mode of perception to be that "wherein a thing is perceived through its essence alone, or through a knowledge of its proximate cause."[3] Perception through essence alone is another term for "true idea," which is no other than intuition.

Holt is a radical empiricist who emphasizes "being" rather than "being experienced" as the fundamental reality, fundamental because universal and because its negation is impossible. *"Being not* are words without meaning."[4] Avoiding a discussion of the pragmatist's possible comment that "without meaning" can only mean inexperienceable, and the rationalist's comment that "without meaning" can only mean unthinkable, and hence the Holtian term "being" is merely shorthand for "being experienced" or "being thought," we find in Holt no criterion for the detection of the reality of "being" apart from its own existence. Precisely as in Spinoza, true knowledge of "being" is immediate, is assumed, is intuitive.

One apparent difference (to be noted, though not to be accepted) is found in the Spinozistic statement, "A true idea is something different from its object (*ideatum*). For a circle is one thing, and the idea of one another."[5] Holt would maintain a thought to be the same as the thing thought of, and we hope later to show a fundamental similarity in the two positions.

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[2] Spinoza, "Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione," Sec. IV.

[3] *Idem.*

[4] Holt, "Concept of Consciousness," page 21.

A real disagreement, however, is to be found in their methods as methods of procedure. Spinoza's method of understanding, we have found, postulates intuitive or true knowledge, and the best method becomes the one that reflects upon the truest knowledge—the truest idea; and Spinoza finds that the only idea whose content is a guaranty of its reality is the idea of the Whole. Only the Whole (God, Reality, *Ens Perfectissimum*) is self-dependent and self-contained. Consequently, Spinoza in his treatment of the universe proceeds from the Whole to the parts, logically deducing the properties and relations of the parts from his postulations regarding the Whole. He begins with a definition of God or Substance from which he draws various conclusions as to the relations between the parts and as to the nature of God, who is the Whole; then proceeds to a discussion of the nature and origin of the mind in man; and then of man's emotions; and so places himself in a position logically to exhibit the ethical values which are the purpose of his work. The Whole with which he begins is perforce richer and more complex in qualities and attributes than any of the parts; and the parts, as they are (artificially) subdivided by the inquiring man, become more meager and limited in cosmic virtues.

Holt purposes to begin, exactly as Spinoza, with a self-dependent "given" from which—not in complex-to-simple, but in simple-to-complex order—he will logically deduce the teeming, intricate structure of the Whole. This completely self-dependent he exhibits in "being"; whereas Spinoza finds the completely self-dependent in "being everything." Holt's "being" is indeed the simplest of terms; but, in deducing the complex from this simple, he is compelled to add constantly to his "given" (in a manner which we will presently describe in detail) with the result that his method is not deductive so much as synthetic. The entire movement of Holt's exposition must be conceived of as an accretion of complexities; of Spinoza's, as deduction from complexities.

This opposition of movement in method will be apparent in a short résumé of substance, as defined by both philosophies.

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[5] Tract., paragraph 33.

II

SUBSTANCE

Substance for Spinoza: Attributes, Modes, Individual things; relations between Idea and its Object—Substance for Holt: neutral entities, their hierarchy in simple to complex order—Differences in movement and similarities in content in the two conceptions of Substance—Introduction of causal element, showing likenesses in concept of definition

Substance, for Spinoza, comprised the whole universe, the whole realm of being. "I understand substance to be that which is in itself and is conceived through itself: I mean that the conception of which does not depend upon the conception of another thing from which it must be formed."[6] The only thing to be so conceived is everything, for everything alone stands uncaused, and independent of anything save itself for existence. A synonym in Spinoza for this substance is God.[7] God, substance, or everything exists for man and is revealed to man in two attributes of its infinite being: it exists and is revealed in extension and thought. "We neither feel nor perceive any individual things save bodies and modes of thinking."[8] As a self-sufficient fact, however, substance consists of infinite attributes—ineffable and unknowable to man. All possibilities, all realities past the power of man to think or feel exist in God;[9] but, so far as man is concerned and can be concerned, the universe is limited to thought and extension, to the old, familiar mind and matter. Furthermore, these two attributes are apparent to man in modifications—facets or aspects of substance which depend upon their attribute for conception, and which are designated modes.[10] Thus, table, as a generic term, as a tribe, is a mode (or modification) of the attribute of extension. Finally, the lowest step in the descending order of particularization is the individual thing which enjoys a limited, finite existence in a designated mode:[11] *This* table is an individual thing existing in the tabular mode of extension which, itself, is an attribute of the all-inclusive substance. However, *this* table has being not only in the world of extension (as revealed to my tactile and visual senses), but also in the world of thought. As an idea, it is an individual thought, existing in the general idea (mode) of the class "table." This class, itself in its turn, is a modification of that attribute of substance designated thought. In the nature of the universe, the relation between the attributes of thought and extension is in one sense parallel, immediate, and inevitable, and in another sense does not exist at all. Everything found in the world of extension is likewise in the world of thought, and conversely. This follows inevitably from the fact that all things pertain to substance, and substance is invariably expressed in the two attributes (as well as in an infinity of others) of extension and thought. But on the other hand, no causal relation exists between these attributes, because, as substance, they are identical.[12] Accordingly, table as thing does not cause table as idea; rather, table as thing is caused by an infinite causal chain of previous things in extension; and table as idea is caused by a parallel infinite causal chain in thought. Hence the substantial reality of table is one thing, which takes its place as extension or as thought according to the causal series with which it is connected; its essence is the same in both extension and in thought.

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[6] Spinoza, "Ethics," Pt. L., Def. III.

[7] *Ibid.*, Pt. L., Def. XIV.

[8] *Ibid.*, Pt. II., Ax. 5.

[9] *Ibid.*, Pt. I., Prop. XI and XVI.

[10] "Ethics," Pt. I. Def. V.

[11] *Ibid.*, Pt. II., Def. VII.

Holt, in his search for a fundamental upon which to begin philosophizing, might well have used the words of Spinoza, and have said, "I am looking for 'that, the conception of which does not depend upon the conception of another thing from which it must be formed.' " This desideratum Holt finds in the category of simple, unattired "being." Instead of beginning with the most complex and inclusive—with everything—he begins with simplest and most meager, with the first step above nothing, with modest "being";[13] and yet his "being" fulfils the definition, in words, though not in content, of Spinoza's "everything." Extremes, according to their inveterate habit, meet. Holt finds "being" to be a logical concept, made of logical stuff, and as such is neither mental nor material, for the reason that it is both. To such stuff, he applies the term "neutral."[14] Granting for a moment the immemorial warfare in philosophy between mind and matter, Holt wishes to distinguish a class of neutral entities, or "beings," which because of their immense stakes in both sides may be said to belong to neither. Intensities (of color, sound, or what not), velocities, number series, processes, "laws of nature," and the stuff of logic can not be ranked as exclusive to either army. Like the Jews in Poland, they are found fighting in all ranks. Upon examining the rights of these neutrals, Holt discovers that they include all the rights for which the belligerents are contesting, that the belligerents themselves are in fact neutrals fighting under the false flags of "mind" and "matter," and that these neutral entities are the stuff of which all reality is made. Logic offers Holt a neutral inch, and he takes

[12] *Ibid.*, Pt. II., Prop. VI.

[13] Holt, pages 20 *et seq.*

[14] *Ibid.*, pages 113–114.

a universal ell. One is likely, at first consideration, to find the notion of the ponderous mountains, sailing clouds, and the piercing thoughts of man as such stuff as syllogisms are made of rather grotesque; but familiarity in this case breeds conviction, and it is hard to escape from a reading of Holt's arguments without believing that there is more in his philosophy than one dreamed.

In accordance with the demands of logical structure, Holt proceeds to describe the universe as a neutral mosaic of logical entities, capable of deduction in a simple to complex order, a hierarchical order inherently logical and asymmetrical.[15] Holt's theory is that if the universe is a logical complication of neutral entities, in which different stages of complications can be distinguished, then, by the granting of an appropriate "given," each stage can be logically deduced from the previous one. Thus, if you begin with the generally recognized neutral world of mathematics and formal logic, you may tentatively outline a "logical deduction" of the entire universe, using for a criterion of simplicity the universality of the entity by means of which you develop your deduction. The validity of such a deduction depends upon your ability to pick the proper terms to begin with, and to discover the correct propositions which, acting on these terms, generate the deductions you are seeking. Suppose you take the term, *A*, and then allow the proposition, "*A* repeats itself" to act indefinitely upon this term. The whole system of numerical integers is the astonishingly complex result from this simple beginning, and the web of complicated relationships and intricate states of fact to be deduced from the system is appalling.

Next, suppose you consider all primary mathematics and logic, despite their internal complexities, to be the simplest system of logical terms, relations, and propositions based on the primordial "being"—and such it probably is. The problem then is to find the next simplest system, the system that is one degree more complex, the system that can be logically deduced from correct propositions acting upon mathematics and logic as a "given." You will probably find the traditional "secondary qualities" of Locke, etc., to have "purely ordinal" properties of several dimensions with varying degrees of intensity. Sound and light are notoriously reducible to mathematics, and the spectrum is so completely describable in terms of numbers that it is not an Icarian flight to imagine that, with the proper propositions, the secondary qualities could be deduced from that mathematics which we have decided is the simplest neutral system. Colors, sounds, odors, etc., range second, therefore, in a simple to complex gradation of the neutral realm. Then, perhaps, comes geometry (extension in space) with the various branches of higher mathematics; above these in due order rise mechanics (introducing mass and motion); physics; chemistry; large masses studied under astronomy and geography; organic matter as treated under botany and biology; mind, that is, the substance of psychology, anthropology, history and biography; and lastly, values—the good, the beautiful, the true. Certainly, chemistry, in the close analysis, reduces itself to physics; life reduces itself (in the opinions of many) to chemistry; and biography is a complex particularization of biology. Such a universe—the actual universe —is thus conceived as one in substance, and many only in complexities. "Being" is the most universal, and at the same time the simplest entity, and it should be noted that the more you add to it, by repeating itself, the more particular your description becomes. A man, the most individual of all things that we know of, consequently contains the richest and largest number of complexities.

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[15] *Ibid.*, pages 154 *et seq.*

The opposition of movement in the two philosophies can be seen at once. Spinoza holds that not man, but God—not the particular, but the concrete universal—includes the greatest number of complexities, for his fundamental substance is, in Holt's sense, infinitely complex. Spinoza is a magician whose hat is the universe from which he takes all things. Holt, in an equally magical, but genetically contradictory fashion, makes all things grow logically from the universal seed of "being," as a pot of flowers sprouts from a thimble under an illusionist's wand.

A somewhat close comparison will, however, reveal a number of similarities. So far as man, and therefore any discourse, is concerned, the universe of Spinoza is *duplex* in its inevitable manifestations as extension and thought. The remainder of the infinite attributes in which substance disports itself is irrelevant because unknowable. If put to it, Holt would also admit that his neutral stuff (so far as human discourse is concerned) constantly appears in two systems of relations, the so-called "mental" and "material," and that his neutral stuff never appears *outside* either of these systems. In two smashing chapters, "The Substance of Ideas" and "The Substance of Matter" in which he pulverizes mind and matter into an elemental neutral substance, Holt still does not deny the being of mind and matter.[16] He only denies their difference in substance, but maintains their differences as two *classes*[17] or *manifolds*[18] of the same substance. I shall elaborate later precisely what Holt means by *manifold,* but sufficient is hinted in saying that he describes two—the "conscious manifold" and the "physical manifold'' corresponding to the ordinary terms, mind and matter. He avows the difficulty, indeed, of placing such palpably neutral entities as mathematical concepts exclusively in either manifold, but nowhere denies that all subjects of human discourse must appear at least in one of the two. I hold not my life so lightly as to hint that Holt is dualistic, but am merely pointing out that Holt's conception is *duplex* (as is Spinoza's) in that it admits mind and matter to be distinct (in class, though not in substance) and distinguishable. The similarity between Holt and Spinoza can be made more marked by transposing the terms without impairing the sense of either philosophy. Spinoza's substance is neutral stuff appearing in two systems of relations, classes, or manifolds—the mental and material. Neither mentality nor materiality as a distinct something is real for Spinoza; only substance is ultimately real. Similarly, Holt's neutral mosaic is revealed in two attributes, thought and extension.

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[16] *Ibid.*, page 132.

[17] *Ibid.*, page 135.

[18] *Ibid.*, page 126.

The introduction of the causal or dynamic element into what would otherwise constitute static universes will further emphasize the similarity and the difference. Spinoza defines everything in his universe either in terms of its essence, which we have shown to be no other than the content of an act of intuition, or in terms of its proximate cause. As Spinoza finds that only everything can adequately be conceived in terms of its essence, that is, as self-dependent, the universe, when not considered as a whole, must always be conceived dynamically, actively, in terms of cause and effect. The perfect definition of anything is such, says Spinoza ''that all the properties of that thing . . . can be concluded from it.''[14] Holt might well have said this. In fact, Holt, using the logical methodology, defines everything either in terms of a ''given,'' or in terms of a proposition or law, which acting upon such ''given'' permits a logical deduction of the thing defined.[20] Undefined terms compose the ''given,'' terms which are merely exhibited or named, which are raw metal stamped with the sterling-mark of ''intuition.'' Such undefined, intuitively perceived terms coincide with ''things perceived through their essence'' as required by Spinoza. When we come to compare ''proposition'' with ''proximate cause,'' we find Holt explicitly stating that ''causality and logical necessity are one.''[21] ''Causality,'' natural law, physical activity is precisely what Spinoza means by ''proximate cause,'' and ''logical necessity'' is precisely what Holt means by ''propositions''; and, as Holt affirms, they are one. For example, suppose you set out

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[19] Tract., Sec. XIII.

[20] Holt, page 16.

[21] *Ibid.*, page 132.

to define a circle. Following Holt's recipe, you collect an appropriate "given"—in this case, a straight line of which one end is fixed and the other movable. To define the line is not required; you assume it and merely exhibit it. This is what Spinoza would term "perceiving it through its essence"; an absolute knowledge of the nature of a straight line is granted you. You now permit a proposition, or proximate cause, to act upon the line. If you are wise, you will select a certain proposition which is algebraically expressed as "$x^2 + y^2 = r^2$." The line revolves, and the figure described by the free end is a circle. And so Spinoza maintains that a circle should always be defined "to be a figure which is described by any line of which one extremity is fixed and the other movable, for this definition clearly comprehends its proximate cause."[22] It is not to be understood that the proposition describes the circle in the sense that words describe a picture; the proposition, acting on the terms, *makes* the circle; the laws of gravitation *make* bodies fall; causality is real.

These likenesses are all in the matter of definition. With respect to the actual universe defined, occasion shall be taken to show that while Holt, like Spinoza, conceives the universe as changing and dynamic, the shortcomings of logic do not permit him adequately to express this idea of change. Logic is obstinately static, and Holt hardly overcomes this handicap. In sum, however, the language of the two men can again be happily transposed. *"Natura Naturans,"* the active, changing, creative universe of Spinoza is the totality of "propositions"; and *"Natura Naturata,"* the passive, static, and immutable universe is the totality of all possible "Givens," of all terms and relations.

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(*To be continued.*)

ARE ALL JUDGMENTS "PRACTICAL"?

IT must be some time since anything has appeared in America that marks such a definite and important advance in logical theory as Professor Dewey's article on "The Logic of Judgments of Practise."[1] It appeals to me not only by the admirable lucidity and thoroughness with which it clears up inveterate ambiguities in terms (like "value," "valuation," "objective," "end," etc.) which have long obstructed progress, but also by the boldness with which

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[22] Tract., Sec. XIII.

[1] This JOURNAL, Vol. XII., pages 505 ff.